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**THE HISTORY OF THE ATTITUDE OF  
NON-RESISTANCE AND THE REFUSAL  
OF MILITARY DUTIES BY THE  
EARLY CHRISTIANS**

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### **THE HISTORY OF THE ATTITUDE OF NON-RESISTANCE AND THE REFUSAL OF MILITARY DUTIES BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS**

Christadelphians should remember that their position regarding participation in war is not one that originated during the American Civil War, but rather is consistent with the attitude of the disciples and early followers of Christ in the First Century. That all may be thoroughly familiar with the historical phase of our position, the Committee issues the following bulletin.

The basis of the attitude of the First Century Christians in their refusal of military service, is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5th chapter) and in the more explicit command of the Master to Peter (Matt. 26:52) to "put up thy sword." If ever there was a time when resistance to evil might have been justified, it was when the Son of God was about to be seized by wicked hands. The Master explained the reason why his servants were not to fight (John 18:36) because his "kingdom was not of this world."

The Apostle Paul later confirms this in other words in 2 Cor. 10:3; 4: "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." He himself records his non-resistance, in 2 Cor. 11:20 to 23, telling how he was "in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent."

The New Testament contains no record of the actions of the early Christians, but there is no question that they followed the commands of Jesus and the Apostles as stated briefly above. There is confirmation of this in evidence outside of the Bible. In Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," obtainable in any good library, we find in Chapter 15, volume 1, a record of the steadfast refusal of the First Century Christians to serve in the Roman army:

"Their simplicity was offended by the use of oaths, by the pomp and magistracy, and by the active contention of public life; nor could their humane ignorance be convinced that it was lawful on any occasion to shed the blood of our fellow-creatures, either by the sword of justice, or by that of war; even though their criminal and hostile attempts should threaten the peace and safety of the whole community."

A more recent author, Lyman Coleman, a professor of Lafayette College, Pa., in his publication, "Ancient Christianity," (now out of print) quotes a letter to Emperor Trajan from Pliny, a Roman governor of Bithynia in the year A. D. 103, "that there is no forcing those who are really Christians into a compliance with any of these articles" (the serving of heathen gods and Roman customs, including service in the Roman army.)

On page 51 of this same book, the author quotes Justin Martyr, a convert of A. D. 148, as follows: "We who once hated and killed one another, now pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those that unjustly hate us."

On page 52, Tatian, a Christian writer of A. D. 70, says: "I desire not to reign; I wish not to be rich, I AVOID MILITARY OFFICE; I am fearless of death."

The same author quotes Athenagorus, a Greek Christian writer of A. D. 176: "With us you may find ignorant people, mechanics, old women, who though unable to prove with word the saving power of their religion, yet by their deeds prove the saving influence of the disposition which it has bestowed upon them; when struck, they strike not again; when robbed they do not go to law; they give to those that ask, and love their neighbors as themselves."

Tertullian, an early writer, states: "He who with one word could have commanded legions of angels to his aid, would not accept the avenging sword of a disciple."

It is related of a young man in Numidia, before the persecution under Diocletian, A. D. 296, that he refused to take the military oath: "Strike off my head; I fight not for this world, but for my God." "Who has advised you thus?" said the pro-consul. "My heart and He that called me." "But you must take the soldier's badge." "I bear the badge of Christ, my God." "I will soon send you, then, to your God." "Would that you might; but that would not reflect honor upon you." The pro-consul then attempted by force to invest him with the soldier's badge. "I cannot wear it; I have taken the badge of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, whom you know not, who died for our salvation, an offering for our sins. Him we Christians serve as the Prince of Life, the Captain of our salvation." "Enlist in this service that you die not miserably." "I shall not die; my name is with the Lord." "But there are Christians in Caesar's army, good and faithful soldiers." "They know what they ought to do, and must judge for themselves; but I am a Christian, and cannot consent to do evil."

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### PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

Once again the peace of the world is threatened by the war clouds that overshadow it. Any day now the brethren, and sisters also, may be called upon to give "an account of their stewardship" in a very real sense. Once again also we may have to realize in a more than ordinary way that we are still "our brother's keeper."

What is the attitude which we must take, and faithfully maintain, both now and in the event that we are called upon to take up arms, which will best help the cause of all to secure exemption from military service? It would seem as if the most important thing is PRAYER for divine guidance and help. Everyone can help in this way. Even those, who by reason of age or infirmities would not possibly be called, can help mightily in this respect, for apart from God's help all our efforts will be useless. And especially should we pray "*for all those who are in authority*" that they may leave us alone to lead "*quiet and peaceable lives.*" This is only occasionally done in the meetings of the brethren today.

Paul enjoined it in his day because it was necessary. The brethren in the first century were always exposed to peril at the hands of the authorities. Persecution of a violent kind frequently occurred. It was therefore an urgent matter of necessity to petition God that "kings and all in authority" should be restrained and guided so the saints could carry on their work unmolested. The presence of danger will create the need of prayer for protection from it again. Remember "*the Lord's arm is not shortened.*" The same God that protected the true Christians in Paul's day can do so today, if we ask in faith.

But we cannot and must not leave it all to the Almighty. "Workers together with God" is the principle laid down. There are things we must do. The first thing necessary is the development of our spiritual strength. This means that the Bible, which to us is the voice of Eternal Wisdom, must not be treated only in an occasional and indifferent way, but must be read and studied daily. Only in this way can we follow Christ.

He declared in simple and expressive terms, "*I am not of this world.*" The whole course of his life shows just what He meant by these words. He took no part in the movement of men, patriotic or otherwise. However, he faithfully discharged the duties of citizenship when these did not conflict with God's purpose and work. Christ paid his taxes, but He did not mix in the politics of the Roman state. Christ's one simple aim was to do the Will of Him that sent him, and not to seek popularity or favor.

His command to his disciples is that they try to follow in the course that he pursued before them. "*I have given you an example.*" "*Ye are not of this world, even as I am not of this world.*" It is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master. "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" Now service is simply the objective of love. We serve most that which we love best. Christ's case is the standard and the only standard. The course of true believers is to follow Christ without reservation, regardless of what disadvantage it will be to themselves. We cannot do more than lose our lives for Christ, and thousands have done this before us. Of these Christ says, "*He that loses his life for my sake shall find it.*"

We, as believers cannot expect to be immune in the distress and trouble which the scriptures say belong to the close of "Gentile times." The end of each "dispensation" was marked by a similar state of things. At the end of the Mosaic dispensation, Jesus gave His disciples to understand that distress and trouble would come upon them for their trials. The community in general was to experience "great distress in the land and wrath upon this people," but in addition to that the disciples were "*to be hated of all men for His name's sake.*" (Matt. 10:22).

The effect of this upon many of His followers Jesus himself describes: "Then shall many be offended and shall betray one another and hate on another. And many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:10). But Christ reassuringly and significantly adds, "*He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.*" We must apply the same reasoning in our own day. Persecution has been the lot of believers from the beginning of time. It will help us none to shut our eyes to the fact that things will go from bad to worse. Strife and bitterness assailed the Apostles' age, and even under the best of conditions our own age has never been free from it.

If in the confusions of the first century, which witnessed the resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of the spirit of God, together with so many visible manifestations of His power, "*the love of many waxed cold,*" it cannot be marvelled at if a similar result comes in our time when we are without guidance except that which is contained in the written word, and when we must "live by faith and not by sight."

We have this consolation. There will be in our day as there has always been in the past, those who "will endure to the end."

Who will these be? "It is written, blessed are they that love thy law, nothing shall them offend." Friends may fail, the work of God may be marred by carnal men, both within and without the household. But to those that "love God's law" nothing can destroy the purpose or displace the confidence of the man or woman who "trusteth in God and maketh not the flesh his arm." We may not be understood. In fact we know we cannot be. The clouds will gather thickly and the storm rage fiercely, but when it is all over the Sun of Righteousness will shine with healing in His wings, and the faithful will enjoy rest and peace and gladness for evermore.

## SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTADELPHIAN POSITION IN REGARD TO WAR

The whole life and practice of Christ and His apostles was, not to seek gain or glory for themselves, or to advance themselves by aggression or strife of any sort, but to minister to the good and welfare of other men and, by their example to lead men to God. *This ideal is important to remember because it completely changes the mental atmosphere of ALL who try to follow it.*

The following references will show, not only that none of the true followers of Christ may use the sword, either for offensive or defensive purposes, but that all contention, violence, strife, seeking of vengeance, or retaliatory measures and even self-defence by force are forbidden them.

He expressly forbade His followers to use the sword, in Matt. 26:52 in these words, "Put up again into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." This should be noted in particular because some have advanced the thought that *there are some occasions when the sword is justified*, e. g., in the defence of honor or life or country. Jesus' words however, not only here but all through the New Testament, do not allow this. In no instance does He permit or sanction its use. Again, He himself could have claimed this excuse with better reason than most others. If any occasion justified its use, surely it did then, but here, as on all other occasions, He put his own words into practice and suffered wrong rather than defend Himself. The last message that Jesus gave His followers contained the same words (Rev. 13:10): "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword."

One may see more clearly the reason for the non-aggressive attitude of Christ, if he understand the plan and purpose of God that Christ was working out. We cannot go into this fully here but the germ of the idea is found in Christ's answer to Pilate (John 18:36): "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." This, then, is not the time for His servants to fight. Christ taught that He would return again from heaven to put down and overthrow all oppression, all power and authority in the earth and set up his own kingdom that would bring peace on earth and good will to all men. When that takes place He and his servants will fight, but it must not be until then. In the meantime, He has ordered His followers to seek the welfare and good of all men and to teach by precept and example (*especially by example*), kindness, generosity, charity and love for mankind.

We indeed believe that the spirit that Christ tried to instill into the minds of His followers is the greatest in the world, the highest standard in existence and is the reason that Christianity holds the place it does in the minds of men. This spirit was in direct contrast

to the natural impulses of men. The first law of nature is self-preservation. All of the other laws of the natural man are likewise selfish. "SELF" is the inspiration of nearly every human act. This spirit calls for aggression. It demands protection of what we call "our rights." It breeds hatred, envy, greed, malice and kindred traits of character. Jesus taught men that there is a higher spirit than that of retaliation; a loftier motive than that of personal advancement. His life's work was to minister to others, not to seek their harm or to destroy them. His was the law of unselfishness in the very highest degree. He taught his followers to give all for others and He carried it out Himself by giving His life for the world, many of them His enemies.

Jesus taught that the ONE WAY to the Kingdom of God was to change our natural traits of character, which He called the "mind of the flesh," to this higher standard, which He called "the mind of the Spirit," or, in His own words, "Ye must be born again," and note how important He makes this point (John 3:3-5): "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." This means that, instead of demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—grant complete forgiveness. Instead of exacting punishment or justification for a wrong, "bless them that curse you, do good to those that hate you." It seems to us that no man could follow the Master in these things and take *any part* in the warfare of men. These two states of mind are very far apart and irreconcilable. And when we speak of WARS we must include all kinds, whether wars of conquest, defensive wars, racial, social, religious, economic, labor or any other that calls for force or the bearing of arms. The TRUE CHRISTIAN does not depend on these to secure his rights.

The Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5th and 6th chapters—the sum total of all His teachings and His life's example is SELF-SACRIFICE, the very NEGATION of the WAR SPIRIT, as the following references indicate.

"The servant of God must not strive but be gentle unto all men"—2 Tim. 2:24.

"Recompense no man evil for evil"—Rom. 12:17.

"Avenge not yourselves. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord"—Rom. 12-19.

"But I say unto you, resist not evil"—Matt. 5:39.

"Love your enemies—that you may be children of your Father which is in heaven"—Matt. 5:44.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory"—Phil. 2:3.

"Be ye harmless as doves"—Matt. 10:16.

"Put on therefore as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another"—Col. 3:12.

"But the weapons of your warfare are not carnal" — (i. e., swords, guns, etc.)—2 Cor. 10:4.

"Ye have condemned and killed the just and he doth not resist you"—James 5:6.

"The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them"—Luke 9:56.

"From whence cometh wars and fighting among you? Cometh they not hence, even of your own lusts that war in your members"—James 4:1.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the very spirit of war, the spirit of vengeance, the spirit of retaliation, the spirit of self-justification, should have no place in the life of a TRUE disciple of Jesus Christ. Christ gives no precept that enjoins war—offensive or defensive. He gives no precept that would countenance a Christian fighting under any circumstances. He gives no precept that allows punishment by a Christian even if deserved.

It may be argued that this spirit, if adopted by one nation and not by others, would result in the subjugation of that nation by the others, then brute force would rule the world. This would be true if God did not rule in the kingdoms of men, but He does, "and giveth it to whomsoever He will." He limits their power for evil. And it should be remembered that the Scripture, as we understand it, does not anticipate that any nation, as a unit would follow His precepts and none ever have. Jesus makes salvation an individual matter and often intimates that His followers would be in a minority, unpopular and out of step with the world in general. They also would find themselves unable to accept some decrees of their rulers. The disciples often found themselves in this position and were persecuted and put to death because of it.

Christadelphians will sincerely honor the laws of the land in which they live, that do not conflict with the laws of God. When it is necessary to refuse for conscience sake, any law of the land, do so in a humble, courteous spirit and trust with confidence that God will take care of you. Be truly grateful that God has in the past in this country, put in the hearts of those who rule, a way of escape from military service to us who conscientiously believe these things.

*As true Brethren of Christ be consistent. Practice in your everyday affairs the principles set forth here. They are given for everyday use, not merely as an excuse to avoid military service. The command to love your enemies means all of them, not just a few. Your character is built up of small everyday deeds. These should always reflect the spirit of your Master Jesus Christ, otherwise He is not your Master.*

Your profession is to LIVE so that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Remember—a TRUE CHRISTIAN is always a gentleman. Trust God. Nothing is too hard for Him, and He knows all.

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### **"RENDER UNTO CAESAR"**

There is, I think a clear line of demarcation in the words, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." What have we that belongs to Caesar? What have we that belongs to God? In dealing with this matter our Lord placed one feature beyond discussion. We have to render to Caesar what bears his image and superscription. We must pay rates and taxes, and any demands that may be made upon us, which have to be met with coin of the realm. If we have property it has been bought with coin of the realm, or represents so much in value in coin which bears Caesar's image and superscription. Should wealth be conscripted by the "powers that be" we must let it go. It is Caesar's. Everything we possess has come to us by the mercy of God in the favorable condition which prevails in this country, and consequently all must go to the country (Caesar) if and when he demands it. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry noth-

ing out." I do not believe this justifies us in putting money into loans by *invitation* at an enticing percentage. If, however, Caesar *demand*s it, it must go without any consideration of percentage.

What then is left? Nothing but ourselves, and we are not our own! What is the "we" in this case? We have no existence apart from our bodies, and they are not our own. To whom do they belong? To Caesar or to Christ? 1 Cor. 6:19,20 will supply the answer. "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and ye are not your own . . . Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." The revised Version stops there, and the following words are not found in most of the earliest authorities. Again, in 1 Cor. 7:23, "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants (slaves) of men." Our bodies then are God's — bought with the precious blood of Christ—and hence it becomes our duty, while he permits us to use them, to present them in living sacrifice to God, which is our "reasonable service." Then we have to give to Caesar everything we have if he demands it, but ourselves we cannot give, for our bodies (ourselves) have been bought with Christ's precious blood, and are no longer our own. We belong to God who provided and prepared the purchaser. Render, therefore, unto God the things which are God's.

How can we then violate God's law by giving our bodies to Caesar? Caesar's men of authority cannot appreciate our position, and are in the main disinclined to listen to our story. But the Master's words come encouragingly to our ears, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Brethren, we have often revelled in Paul's assurance of the firmness of those who believe (Rom. 8:38, 39). Where are we, now that the test has come? Are we brethren of the Lord in theory only, or is it in fact? Has our service been mere lip service, or is it from the heart? Quit you like men, brethren; be strong, and remember that there is a limit to what man can do, but there are no limitations with God (Matt. 10:28).

T. W. GAMBLE, Leicester, England